

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1-14. (Canceled)

15. (Currently Amended) A process for the hydrolysis of 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile comprising:

(a) hydrating 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile in a sulphuric acid medium to produce 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyramide, wherein the molar quantity of sulphuric acid relative to the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile is between 0.6 and 0.88[[,]] and the molar quantity of water to 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile is between 1 and 3, ~~and further wherein the hydration is carried out at a temperature of less than or equal to 60°C and under vacuum;~~ and

(b) hydrolyzing the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyroamide in the presence of an additional quantity of water to produce 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyric acid in a reaction mass,

wherein the hydrating step (a) is carried out at such a pressure that the temperature of the reaction medium does not exceed 60°C by evaporating water and the hydrolyzing step (b) is not carried out until the reaction medium of the hydrating step (a) contains more than 98% by weight 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyramide.

16. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15, wherein the molar quantity of sulphuric acid relative to the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile is between 0.7 and 0.85.

17-20. (Canceled)

21. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15, wherein the molar quantity of water to 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile is between 1 and 2.5.

22-23. (Canceled)

24. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15, wherein during the hydrolyzing step (b) a sufficient quantity of water is added in order to maintain the reaction mass in a homogeneous form.

25. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 24, wherein the minimum quantity of water added is 28% by weight relative to the reaction mass.

26. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15, wherein the hydrolyzing step (b) is carried out at temperature ranging between 90 and 130°C.

27. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15, wherein the hydrolyzing step (b) is carried out at pressure ranging between 0.5 and 5 bar.

28. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15, further comprising:

supplying the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile as a concentrated feed stream during the hydrating step (a); and

maintaining the molar quantity of water of 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile between 1 and 3.

29. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 21 further comprising:

supplying the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile as a concentrated feed stream during the hydrating step (a); and

maintaining the molar quantity of water of 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile between 1 and 2.5.

30. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 28 or 29, wherein the concentrated feed stream comprises about 80 wt.% 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile.

31. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 15 further comprising:

supplying the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile as a dilute aqueous feed stream during the hydrating step (a); and

maintaining the molar quantity of water to 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile between 1 and 3 by evaporating excess water.

32. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 21 further comprising:

supplying the 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile as a dilute aqueous feed stream during the hydrating step (a); and

maintaining the molar quantity of water to 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile between 1 and 2.5 by evaporating excess water.

33. (Currently Amended) [[A]] The process according to claim 31 or 32, wherein the dilute aqueous feed stream comprises about 50 wt.% 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyronitrile.

34. (Canceled)

35. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein the reaction medium of the hydrating step (a) contains less than 2% by weight of 2-hydroxy-4-methylthiobutyric acid.

36. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein step (a) is carried out at a pressure ranging between 0.01 and 3 bar.

37. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein step (a) is carried out at a temperature ranging between 0 to 50°C.

38. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein step (a) is completed by stopping the supply of reagents.

39. (New) The process according to claim 38, wherein step (a) is completed in a plug flow reactor.

40. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein during step (a), water in excess is distilled off.

41. (New) The process according to claim 40, wherein the distilled excess water in step (a) is recycled and used in the hydrolyzing step (b).